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The Return of SHERLOCK HOLMES

By A. CONAN DOYLE.

Author of "The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes," "The Hound of the Baskervilles," "The Sign of the Four," "A Study in Scarlet," Etc.



ILLUSTRATED BY F. D. STEELE

(Continued from Page Nine.)

"You have nothing else to tell us?" He hesitated.

"No, there is nothing."

"You have not been here before last night?"

"No."

"Then how do you account for that?" cried Hopkins, as he held up the damning notebook, with the initials of our prisoner on the first leaf and the blood stain on the cover.

The wretched man collapsed. He sank his face in his hands and trembled all over.

"Where did you get it?" he gasped.

"I did not know. I thought I had lost it at the hotel."

"That is enough," said Hopkins sternly.

"Whatever else you have to say, you must say in court. You will walk down with me now to the police station. Well, Mr. Holmes, I am very much obliged to you and to your friend for coming down to help me. As it turns out, your presence was unnecessary, and I would have brought the case to this successful issue without you; but, none the less, I am grateful. Rooms have been reserved for you at the Brambley hotel, so we can all walk down to the village together."

"Well, Watson, what do you think of it?" asked Holmes as we traveled back next morning.

"I can see that you are not satisfied."

"Oh, yes, my dear Watson; I am perfectly satisfied. At the same time, Stanley Hopkins' methods do not commend themselves to me. I am disappointed in Stanley Hopkins. I had hoped for better things from him. One should always look for a possible alternative and provide against it. It is the first rule of criminal investigation."

"What, then, is the alternative?"

"The line of investigation which I have myself been pursuing. It may give us nothing. I cannot tell. But at least I shall follow it to the end."

Several letters were waiting for Holmes at Baker street. He spat out one of them up, opened it and burst out into a triumphant chuckle of laughter.

"Excellent, Watson! The alternative develops. Have you telegraphed for me? Just write a couple of messages for me: 'Sumner, shipping agent, Ratoff highway. Send three men on to arrive 10 tomorrow morning. Basil! This is my name in those parts. The others: 'Inspector Stanley Hopkins, 43 Leal street, Drifton. Come breakfast tomorrow at 9.30. Important. Wire unable to come. Sherlock Holmes' There, Watson, this infernal case has haunted me for ten days. I have banished it completely from my present. Tomorrow I trust that we shall be the last of it forever."

Sharp at the hour named Inspector Stanley Hopkins appeared, and we set down together to the excellent breakfast which Mrs. Hudson had prepared. The young detective was in high spirits at his success.

"You really think that your solution must be correct?" asked Holmes.

"I could not imagine a more complete case."

"It did not seem to me conclusive."

"You astonish me, Mr. Holmes. What more could one ask for?"

"Does your explanation cover every point?"

"Undoubtedly. I find that young Nelligan arrived at the Brambley hotel on the very day of the crime. He came on the pretense of playing golf. His room was on the ground floor, and he could get out when he liked. That very night he went down to Woodman's Lee, saw Peter Carey at the hut, quarreled with him and killed him with the harpoon. Then, horrified by what he had done, he fled out of the hut, dropping the notebook which he had brought with him in order to question Peter Carey about these different securities. You may have observed that some of them were marked with ticks and the others—the great majority—were not. Those which are ticked have been traced on the London market, but the others presumably were still in the possession of Carey, and young Nelligan, according to his own account, was anxious to recover them in order to do the right thing by his father's creditors. After his fight he did not dare to approach the hut again for some time, but at last he forced himself to do so in order to obtain the information which he needed. Surely that is all simple and obvious?"

Holmes smiled and shook his head.

"It seems to me to have only one drawback, Hopkins, and that is that it is intrinsically impossible. Have you tried to drive a harpoon through a body?"

"No! But, my dear sir, you must really pay attention to these details. My friend Watson could tell you that I spent a whole morning in that exercise. It is no easy matter and requires a strong and practiced arm. But this blow was delivered with such violence that the head of the weapon sank deep into the wall. Do you imagine that this anemic youth was capable of so frightful an assault? Is he the man who hobnobbed in rum and water with Black Peter in the dead-of-night? Was it his profile that was seen on the wall two nights before? No, no, Hopkins, it is another and more formidable person for whom we must seek."

The detective's face had grown long-

ger and longer during Holmes' speech. His hopes and his ambitions were all crumbling about him. But he would not abandon his position without a struggle.

"You can't deny that Nelligan was present that night, Mr. Holmes. The book will prove that. I fancy that I have evidence enough to satisfy a jury, even if you are able to pick a hole in it. Besides, Mr. Holmes, I have laid my hand upon my man. As to this terrible person of yours, where is he?"

"I rather fancy that he is on the stairs," said Holmes serenely. "I think, Watson, that you would do well to put that revolver where you can reach it." He rose and laid a written paper upon a side table. "Now we are ready," said he.

There had been some talking in gruff voices outside, and now Mrs. Hudson opened the door to say that there were three men inquiring for Captain Basil.

"Show them in one by one," said Holmes.

The first who entered was a little rickety-looking man, with ruddy cheeks and fluff white side whiskers. Holmes had drawn a letter from his pocket.

"What name?" he asked.

"James Lancaster."

"I am sorry, Lancaster, but the berth is full. Here is half a sovereign for your trouble. Just step into this room and wait there for a few minutes."

The second man was a long, dried-up creature, with lank hair and sallow cheeks. His name was Hugh Pattins. He also received his dismissal, his half sovereign and the order to wait.

The third applicant was a man of remarkable appearance. A fierce bulldog face was framed in a tangle of hair and beard, and two bold dark eyes gleamed behind the cover of thick, tufted, overhanging eyebrows. He saluted and stood sailor fashion, turning his cap round in his hands.

"Your name?" asked Holmes.

"Patrick Cairns."

"Harpooner?"

"Yes, sir; twenty-six voyages."

"Dundee, I suppose."

"Yes, sir."

"And ready to start with an exploring ship?"

"Yes, sir."

"What wages?"

"Eight pounds a month."

"Could you start at once?"

"As soon as I get my kit."

"Have you your papers?"

"Yes, sir." He took a sheaf of worn and greasy forms from his pocket. Holmes glanced over them and returned them.

"You are just the man I want," said he. "Here is the agreement on the side table. If you sign it the whole matter will be settled."

The seaman lurched across the room and took up the pen.

"Shall I sign here?" he asked, stooping over the table.

Holmes leaned over his shoulder and issued both hands over his neck.

"This will do," said he.

I heard a click of steel and a blow to an enraged bull. The next instant Holmes and the seaman were rolling on the ground together. He was a man of gigantic strength that even with his hand-cuffs Holmes had so deftly steered him on his wrists he would have quickly overpowered my friend.

Holmes and I rushed to his feet. Only when I pressed the butt of the revolver to his temple did he at last understand that resistance was vain. He fashed his ankles and rose breathless from the struggle.

"I must really apologize, Hopkins," said Sherlock Holmes. "I fear that the handcuffs were cold. However, I will enjoy the rest of your breakfast all the better, will you not, for the thought that you have brought your kit to a triumphant conclusion."

Holmes was speechless with amazement.

"Don't know what to say, Mr. Holmes," he blurted out at last, with a

very red face. "It seems to me that I have been making a fool of myself from the beginning. I understand now, what I should never have forgotten, that I am the pupil and you are the master. Even now I see what you have done, but I don't know how you did it or what it signifies."

"Well, well," said Holmes good humoredly. "We all learn by experience, and your lesson this time is that you should never lose sight of the alternative. You were so absorbed in young Nelligan that you could not spare a thought for Patrick Cairns, the true murderer of Peter Carey."

The hoarse voice of the seaman broke in on our conversation.

"See here, mister," said he, "I make no complaint of being man handled in this fashion, but I would have you call things by their right names. You say I murdered Peter Carey; I say I killed Peter Carey, and there's all the difference. Maybe you don't believe what I say, maybe you think I am just slinging my yarn."

"Not at all," said Holmes. "Let us hear what you have to say."

"It's son told, and by the Lord, every word of it is truth. I knew Black Peter, and when he pulled out his knife I whipped a harpoon through him sharp, for I knew that it was him or me. That's how he died. You can call it murder. Anyhow, I'd as soon die with a rope round my neck as with Black Peter's knife in my heart."

"How came you there?" asked Holmes.

"I'll tell you from the beginning. Just sit me up a little so as I can speak easy. It was in '83 that it happened—August of that year. Peter Carey was master of the Sea Unicorn, and I was spare harpooner. We were coming out of the ice pack on our way home, with head winds and a week's southerly gale, when we picked up a little craft that had been blown north. There was one man on board—a landsman. The crew had thought he would founder and had made for the Norwegian coast in a dingy. I knew they were all drowned. Well, we took him on board, this man, and he and the skipper had some long talks in the cabin. All the baggage we took off with him was one tin box. So far as I know, the man's name was never mentioned, and on the second night he disappeared as if he had never been. It was given out that he had either thrown himself overboard or fallen overboard in the heavy weather that we were laying. Only one man

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knew what had happened to him and that was me, for with my own eyes I saw the skipper tip up his heels and put him over the rail in the middle watch of a dark night two days before we sighted the Shetland lights.

"Well, I kept my knowledge to myself and waited to see what would come of it. When we got back to Scotland it was easily hushed up, and nobody asked any questions. A stranger died by accident, and it was nobody's business to inquire. Shortly after Peter Carey gave up the sea, and it was long years before I could find where he was. I guessed that he had done the deed for the sake of what was in that tin box and that he could afford now to pay me well for keeping my mouth shut.

"I found out where he was through a sailor man that had met him in London, and down I went to squeeze him. The first night he was reasonable enough and was ready to give me what would make me free of the sea for life. We were to fix it all two nights later. When I came I found him three parts drunk and in a vile temper. We sat down, and we drank, and we yarned about old times, but the more he drank the less I liked the look on his face. I spotted that harpoon upon the wall, and I thought I might need it before I was through. Then at last he broke out at me, spitting and cursing, with murder in his eyes and a great clasp knife in his hand. He had not time to get it from the sheath before I had the harpoon through him. Heavens, what a yell he gave! And his face gets between me and my sleep. I stood there, with his blood splashing round me, and I waited for a bit, but all was quiet, so I took heart once more. I looked round, and there was the tin box on the shelf. I had as much right to it as Peter Carey, anyhow, so I took it with me and left the hut. Like a fool, I left my booty pouch upon the table.

"Now I'll tell you the queerest part of the whole story. I had hardly got outside the hut when I heard some one coming, and I hid among the bushes. A man came slinking along, went into the hut, gave a cry as if he had seen a ghost and legged it as hard as he could run, until he was out of sight. Who he was or what he wanted is more than I can tell. For my part, I walked ten miles, got a train at Tunbridge Wells, and so reached London and no one the wiser.

"Well, when I came to examine the

box I found there was no money in it and nothing but papers that I would not dare to sell. I had lost my hold on Black Peter and was stranded in London without a shilling. There was only my trade left. I saw these advertisements about harpooners and high wages, so I went to the shipping agents, and they sent me here. That's all I know, and I say again that if I killed Black Peter the law should give me thanks, for I saved them the price of a hepen rope."

"A very clear statement," said Holmes, rising and lighting his pipe. "I think, Hopkins, that you should lose no time in conveying your prisoner to a place of safety. This room is not well adapted for a cell, and Mr. Patrick Cairns occupies too large a proportion of our carpet."

"Mr. Holmes," said Hopkins, "I do not know how to express my gratitude. Even now I do not understand how you attained this result."

"Simply by having the good fortune to get the right clew from the beginning. It is very possible if I had known about this notebook it might have led away my thoughts, as it did yours. But all I heard pointed in the one direction. The amazing strength, the skill in the use of the harpoon, the rum and water, the seal-skin tobacco pouch with the coarse tobacco—all these pointed to a seaman and one who had been a whaler. I was convinced that the initials 'P. C.' upon the pouch were a coincidence and not those of Peter Carey, since he seldom smoked and no pipe was found in his cabin. You remember that I asked whether whisky and brandy were in the cabin. You said they were. How many landsmen are there who would drink rum when they could get these other spirits? Yes, I was certain it was a seaman."

"And how did you find him?"

"My dear sir, the problem had become a very simple one. If it were a seaman it could only be a seaman who had been with him on the Sea Unicorn. So far as I could learn he had sailed in no other ship. I spent three days in wiring to Dundee, and at the end of that time I had ascertained the names of the crew of the Sea Unicorn in 1883. When I found Patrick Cairns among the harpooners my research was nearing its end. I argued that the man was probably in London and that he would desire to leave the country for a time. I therefore spent some days in the east end, devised an arctic ex-

pedition, put forth tempting terms for harpooners who would serve under Captain Basil—and behold the result!"

"Wonderful!" cried Hopkins. "Wonderful!"

"You must obtain the release of young Nelligan, as soon as possible," said Holmes. "I confess that I think you owe him some apology. The tin box must be returned to him; but, of course, the securities which Peter Carey has sold are lost forever. There's the cab, Hopkins, and you can remove your man. If you want me for the trial, my address and that of Watson will be somewhere in Norway. I'll send particulars later."

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